INSTITUTION OF CIVIL ENGINEERS.

On Tuesday last, Sir John Rennie, the new president, on taking the chair for the first time since his election, addressed the meeting at some length. After thanking the members for the honour conferred upon him, and regretting that their choice had not rather fallen upon one of the numerous able men by whom he was surrounded, he alluded briefly to the causes of the recent changes, and the progress of assimilation towards the constitution of other flourishing societies. A well-merited compliment was then paid to the able manner in which Mr. Walker had filled the chair, and by which he had rendered himself so popular. This rendered the task of immediately succeeding him very arduous; but Sir John hoped, that with the support of the council, the countenance of the members, and an ardent devotion to the welfare of the profession, he should be enabled to advance the objects of the institution, and to promote its prosperity. He then proceeded, "when we look around us, and see the vast strides which our profession is making on every side, and the deservedly high place it holds in public estimation, we cannot but feel justly proud, for without the slighest disparagement to the pursuits of duties of other professions, I may confidently ask where can we find nobler or more elevated pursuits than our own; whether it be to interpose a barrier against the raging ocean, and provide an asylum for our fleets; or to form a railway, and by means of that wonderful machine, the locomotive engine, to bring nations together, annihilating, as it were, both space and time, or to construct the mighty steam vessel, which, alike regardless of winds or waves, urges onward its resistless course; or to curb and bring within proper bounds the impetuous torrents, converting its otherwise destructive waves to our use and benefit, whether for navigation, trade, or domestic comfort. Again, the drainage of the unwholesome marsh, and converting it into fields of waving corn; or, illuminating our cities with gas, changing, as it were, night into day; or the fabrication of machinery of endless form and ingenuity, by means of which every article which can tend to man's comfort can be produced in the greatest perfection at the smallest cost; or to recover from the bowels of the earth, nature's exhaustless treasures, and convert them to our use. In fact, we may almost say that there is nothing in the whole range of the material world which does not come under our observation, or where the skill and science of the engineer is not required in a greater or less degree to render the bounties of Providence subservient to the good of mankind. With such splendid prospects before us we have every inducement to stimulate our zeal, and to press forward in the career of improvement. He then impressed upon the members the necessity of not only communicating good papers themselves, but of engaging the junior members of the profession in their employment to keep journals of the proceedings, and to use the materials so obtained as the basis for papers which would be of a most interesting character. The members of all classes were earnestly urged to banish all other feelings except those of unanimity, harmony, and kindness; and to make the institution a rallying point, where individuals, as well as the profession generally, should meet with sympathy and support on all occasions."

The New Mechanics' Hall at Nottingham.—The foundation-stone of this building (the completion of which was celebrated last Tuesday week) was laid on the 12th of June, 1843. The erection is of brick, and stuccoed, and the front and side elevations are Grecian. The capitals of the columns are Corinthian. The external dimensions of the edifice are 124 feet long, 62 feet extreme width, and 46 feet high. The one pair is almost entirely occupied by a noble hall, 80 feet, by 45 feet, and 30 feet high. Under the orchestra is an upper gallery for natural history, 50 feet long, 8 feet 6 inches wide, and 12 feet high; also a committee room, apparatus room, music library, &c. The ground, was presented to the members by John Smith Wright, Esq., of Rempstone, president of the institution.

REPEAL OF THE WINDOW-TAX.

Some of the largest and most influential of the metropolitan parishes have determined upon petitioning Parliament to abolish this most pernicious impost. At St. James's, Westminster (the royal parish), resolutions were passed strongly condemning the tax, principally on the ground of its interfering with light and ventilation, and consequently with the health and happiness of the great mass of the population. At the Marylebone vestry last Saturday, the subject was brought under discussion; the Rev. Dr. Spry presided. Sir C. Napier said, that although the Government had a surplus revenue, and although he would support a total and immediate repeal of the window-duties, still he despaired of success—at least, he despaired that they should get a removal of the impost further than so far as it affected the poorer classes. The claims upon the Government, now that there was a surplus revenue, were pressing in the extreme, and there was one to which his attention had been called which affected the poorer classes, namely, a repeal of the duty on soap. The reason he was afraid that the Government would refuse to grant a total repeal of the window-duties was the vast amount they brought to the revenue—he believed no less than 1,200,000*l*.

On Tuesday last, a very numerous and respectably-attended vestry-meeting was held in St. Anne's parish, Westminster, Mr. W. B. Bird, churchwarden, in the chair. Resolutions in favour of a total repeal of the tax were adopted, and a petition to Parliament, founded on the resolutions, was also agreed to.

Mr. Matthew Humberton, of Clifton, near Bristol, has lately drawn up a memorial to the Premier, in which the objectionable nature of the tax is forcibly pointed out. He says, "Many and various are the claims for relief which are now being pressed upon the attention of the legislature, but of none of them, excepting the window-tax, can it be said that 'this is an absurdity in principle,'—this is an anomaly in taxation which defies the power of human ingenuity to reduce to reason—it is like some *unreal* thing which we cannot understand, for although it is a tax upon windows, it is not primarily a window-tax, neither is it a house-tax, nor a property-tax, nor a landlord's-tax, nor a tenant's-tax, nor a tax upon wealth, nor a tax upon poverty; but it is a compound of all these, and something more—it is essentially a tax upon LIGHT, and that not an artificial one, but the LIGHT OF NATURE, the enlivening, the pure, the holy light—an article beyond the reach of human commerce—an article beyond all price—an article as essential to our existence as the air we breathe, and, by consequence, it is also a tax upon AIR, upon VENTILATION, and upon HEALTH."

Important to Arbitrators.—Recently, in the Court of Queen's Bench, Mr. Pashley shewed cause against a rule which had been obtained by Mr. Godson to set aside an award that had been made in the case Plews against Middleton. The objection to the award was that the two arbitrators, who were lay gentlemen (a builder and an architect), had received some evidence not taken in the presence of the two contending parties. They had gone to certain persons whom they knew to be informed on the subject of the arbitration, and had received their statements without giving the contending parties any information of their intention to examine those persons. The learned counsel contended at some length that the arbitrators here had merely been guilty of an irregularity in their procedure; that there was no pretence for charging them with fraud and corruption; and that their error in proceeding was not a good ground on which to set aside their award. The Court, without calling on Mr. Godson to support the rule, said that it must be absolute. This was not a mere irregularity in procedure; it was something against the first principles of justice. Nothing could be clearer than that a man was always entitled to hear all the evidence on which his rights and liabilities were to be decided, and where they were decided without his having that opportunity, the decision must be treated as invalid. The award must be set aside.

FIRES FROM THE OVER-HEATING OF FLUES.

The inhabitants of Edinburgh were thrown into great consternation last Sunday week by its being discovered that the Old Gray Friars Church was in flames. The whole of the interior was destroyed, and the flames communicated with the New Gray Friars Church, adjoining, which shared the same fate,—nothing but the walls of the two edifices remain. The fire was caused by the over-heating the flues of the old church. Among the property destroyed was a table once in the possession of the Reformer John Knox.

An extensive fire broke out last Saturday week in a steam flour-mill, situate in Gallowgate, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The premises were nearly new, and had been fitted up at great expense with all the recent improvements, the model being supplied by one recently erected in the United States. The fire originated in the upper part of the building, it is supposed from the heating of the flues, whence it had communicated with some of the beams in the vicinity. The damage done is estimated at 2,000*l*.

Last Sunday morning before the commencement of service an alarm was created at Chiswick, by the outbreak of a fire in the parish church. The beadle, while repairing one of the bell-ropes, had his attention arrested by a piece of burning wood falling upon his head from the spire of the church. Upon making his way into the belfry he found the spire, which was composed principally of wood and lead, in a blaze. Having procured assistance, the parish engine was drawn out and set to work, and the fire was confined to that portion of the steeple where it originated; but it was not entirely extinguished until considerable damage had been effected, the spire being much burnt and injured by the molten lead flowing down. The ceilings are also damaged. The cause of the fire is supposed to be the over-heating of one of the flues.

From a similar cause, St. Paul's Church, Covent-garden, was in great danger of being destroyed last Thurday morning. The beadle was fortunately on the spot, and by prompt exertion the fire was soon extinguished.

The Burial Ground Nuisance.—Mr. Geo. Alfred Walker, in pursuance of his long-continued and praiseworthy endeavours to abate the injurious practice of burying in towns, has recently drawn attention to some disgraceful proceedings at Spa Fields Burial Ground. He says:—"This ground is surrounded by houses, many of them tenanted by respectable individuals. On the right is a one-story erection, called a bone-house. For some months past the neighbouring inhabitants having observed flame and sparks issuing from the chimney, entertained apprehensions that improper practices were in progress, and on a recent occasion, called upon the engine-keeper of the parish for his assistance in extinguishing what they believed to be a fire. He demanded admission, but was refused and resisted by the grave-digger. Being determined, however, to execute his duty, he seized a crow-bar, and having threatened to break in the door, it was opened. He observed a great quantity of coffin wood piled round the room drying, a fire made entirely of coffins in the grate, and portions of human bones also. The engine keeper particularly noticed the appearance of the chimney, and charged the grave-digger with having used water to extinguish the flame, which was denied; and he was told that what he "thought was water—was pitch;" and this was the fact. Thick flakes of pitch were adhering to the inside of the chimney, thus giving palpable evidence of the material consumed,—viz., coffin-wood, about two pounds of pitch being used in 'pitching' round the inner joints of an ordinary coffin. The inhabitants of Exmouth-street, Fletcher-row, Vineyard-gardens, and Northampton-row, in the immediate neighbourhood, have frequently complained of 'a tremendous stench' of a peculiar kind, which they say proceeds from the burning of human remains and coffins."

New Street to Long-Acre.—We receive great complaints against the bad and inconvenient form of many of the houses lately erected between Leicester-square and Long-Acre. We must look at them.

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